

Ernest Manning and Pastoral Politics¹

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On 23 May 1943, while visiting his adult daughters in Vancouver, William Aberhart, premier of Alberta, unexpectedly died. A week later, on 31 May, his successor, Ernest Manning, was appointed premier, and the next day, Mrs. N. Torgrud wrote a letter that soon found its way to his new desk. Torgrud was concerned about the lack of access she experienced distributing gospel literature on trains. Recounting a time she tried, Torgrud described how the conductor stopped her on account of the fact that no one was permitted to circulate tracts on trains. She argued that her tracts were simply gospels, not denominational materials. Furthermore, she continued, with so “many soldiers and sinners on a train” it was a great way to meet people and share the gospel; after all, “God is not going to listen to us if we are hard and disobedient.” Torgrud asked Manning to write to Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King to “do something about it . . . It is like keeping Jesus off the train and many a mother’s boy will perish because we can’t seem to do anything.”² Manning responded, “I am sorry that the matter of the distribution of tracts on trains is entirely outside the authority of the Province. I am, therefore, afraid there is not anything I can do . . . along the lines that you suggest.”³

While trains remain the preserve of the federal government, how did the evangelical preacher premier respond to constituents on issues that intersected at the provincial level involving questions of religion, society, and public services? A year later, in 1944, Mrs. Beryl Lee of Fort Assiniboine wrote Manning concerned about the teaching of evolution in the schools. Some families were concerned about the inclusion of “Stone

Age Man in the schoolbooks . . . they describe the first man and picture him as a gorilla monster.” As her fervid prose cooled she simply concluded that the curriculum contradicted Genesis’ account of humanity created in the image of God.⁴

Manning responded by encouraging Lee to distinguish between disproven theory and established fact. He claimed that “organic evolution is definitely a disproven theory” by both scripture and science. Moreover, regarding schools, he stated that whether it was taught in the classroom as part of a curriculum that teaches the difference between what is true and false was important. However, teaching evolution as established fact “is violating the purpose for which the theory is included in general education, and at the same time is exhibiting an ignorance of the facts established by modern science.” Then Manning addressed a specific theological objection, the age of the earth. He argued that it was unimportant in this conversation because between the first two verses of Genesis there was plenty of time when all the geological ages could be found, saying, “[it was] a period in which the earth was in a state of chaos and desolation before it was re-formed as the home of man in the seven re-creative days of Genesis 1 and 2.”⁵ The theological explanation called “Gap Theory” – by which classical creationists hold to a literal six twenty-four hour days of creation yet maintain that the time between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2 is indeterminate and in this “gap” place scientific discoveries – now came from the premier’s office.

From these brief examples of Manning’s correspondence with Albertan residents, we have a glimpse of a premier engaged as political leader and religious teacher. Ernest Manning, throughout his tenure as premier, mixed his roles as politician, teacher, and preacher and worked the trio pastorally. From legislative change in the areas of the liquor trade to Sunday labour laws to many others, Manning governed pastorally and ministered politically. In this article, following an outline of Manning’s political thinking and a broad sketch of his pastoral comportment, I trace this hybridity by examining his political thought and religious convictions when they mingled in two issues selected for their importance to his evangelical constituency: alcohol and the Lord’s Day.

Political Thought

Manning’s primary political villain was communism or totalitarianism. As he preached, “the totalitarian nations openly renounce all

allegiance to the God of Heaven, and are pursuing with a vengeance their avowed intention of obliterating Christianity from earth. But hear me; the Christian democratic nations are turning their backs upon God in just as positive a manner.” On this point Manning implored his listeners to stop calling Canada a “Christian nation,” for Canada had long rejected Christ as its sovereign – it was no longer a Christian nation. Finally, he called Canada to return to its heritage “under God,” as Abraham Lincoln called upon Americans to do in the previous century.⁶

Throughout his career Manning was concerned with the realities of the Cold War and the spiritual state of his fellow citizens, and both coalesced in a political philosophy grounded in personal and economic freedom. He boiled down his vision of government to “establish a free and open society where you encourage private initiative and enterprise and create an atmosphere where people can see their own enterprise and initiative get the results they want in their society.”⁷

A large and growing force within the political system that threatened these ideals were lobby groups. Manning criticized them over the air on his “These are the Facts” program that began in January 1955. He explained to his listeners that, “in a healthy democracy there is nothing wrong with public pressure coupled with public effort to improve and better conditions for the people as a whole . . . Unfortunately there has developed in recent years, a pressure-group complex that . . . is harmful to the best interests of the people as a whole.”⁸ Presaging President Dwight Eisenhower’s “military industrial complex” image in his 1961 farewell address, Manning saw in lobby groups a powerful set of connections between government and narrowly-defined interest groups making claims to the public purse.

The expansion of lobby groups in the 1950s led to an exertion of influence that Manning found troubling on four points: firstly, many lobby groups were trying to push onto government responsibilities that rightfully belonged to individuals and families – such as caring for one’s own children and elders. As he explained, “no wonder individual and family life is losing the self reliance and strength that marked the pioneers who opened this country sixty years ago.”⁹

Secondly, such groups pitted people against each other as they struggled to acquire what they saw as their share of public money. Thirdly, they treated public money as if it belonged to the government only to give it away and that it did not belong to all people; Manning found that unconscionable. And, finally, lobby groups rarely considered their requests

in relation to their impact on anyone else. Manning saw selfishness in how special interest groups acted as if they were entitled to the public purse.¹⁰

Since Social Credit first formed government in 1935, Manning observed a trend of “social and political evolution” that only reinforced the growth of lobbies: tremendous scientific and technological progress that brought North America unprecedented wealth and a high standard of living. As a result, Manning noted an ironic development: “individual independence and personal responsibility are giving way to more and more collectivism and acceptance of the socialistic concept of the welfare or paternal state.” In fact, more and more people were calling for the state to “provide not only for their actual needs but for their desires in an ever increasing number of fields, and that the state assume this responsibility for the entire span of their lives, from the cradle to the grave.” He perceived too many people considered these services “free.”¹¹ This problem was exacerbated by politicians outbidding each other for votes yet only able to pay for these things with taxes. However, the expansion of government was too rapid for the tax base to cover expenditures. Thus, unwilling or unable to raise taxes appropriately to fund promises, government turned increasingly to deficit financing.¹²

For Manning, this development resulted in the “pyramiding of taxation and debt with an inevitable day of reckoning,” soon to come. His concern was that such a reckoning would result in several negatives: higher prices making Canada less competitive in trade, further expansion of government bureaucracy, and a promotion of “the progressive loss of individual initiative, independence and freedom.” He argued for government spending limits to limit the government’s responsibility for an individual’s welfare, “thereby avoiding the evil consequences of the present trend.” The state should help those who could not help themselves, but only for the basics of life, not all “desires,” especially for the aged, infirm, and public schools.¹³ Manning continued, “let us not sell the Canadian people short by assuming that the majority want welfare statism rather than the preservation of individual responsibility and independence and freedom.”¹⁴

Waxing eloquent on these themes from a more theological perspective, Manning explained, at length, the relationship between freedom, government, a higher power, and the deleterious effects of materialism:

a society that adopts the philosophy that man lives by bread alone must not be surprised when the people comprising that society

demand more and more bread. Only as people recognize that there is more to life than material security will the craving for that security be tempered by an appreciation of the value and importance of things spiritual and eternal, including the priceless assets of personal freedom and independence which man as a created personality inherently desires. In short, when the One who spoke with the authority of Deity said, ‘man shall not live by bread alone . . .’ He was not only stating sound theology but sound economics for only when men see in proper perspective the spiritual as well as the temporal needs of man will there be lessening of the materialistic pressures which divert their feet into paths which lead to economic and political and social chaos. We would do well to heed His counsel.¹⁵

In Manning’s political philosophy, there existed two extremes to the relationship between government and the people regarding social progress. On one hand, people were simply left on their own to succeed or fail with no responsibilities for the state. He described this as, “based on the survival of the fittest. It surely has no place in modern, enlightened, twentieth-century society.” The other extreme, of cradle to grave government responsibility, was also a non-starter and historically incongruent with Canadian society; it was a “relic of the social evolution of past years and the older European countries from whence it was imported to this continent, and is often paraded here as a modern social concept.”¹⁶ Invoking the frontier myths of North American development, Manning rejected this approach as antithetical to the western experience: “it is a philosophy alien to this country and this continent, and certainly it is completely foreign to the pioneer spirit of self-reliance and enterprise that was responsible for developing Canada and The United States into countries with the greatest productivity and the highest standard of living in the world.”¹⁷ On an individual level this philosophy was corrosive to dignity, freedom, personal responsibility, and enterprise, for it ultimately “reduces all members of society to the lowest common denominator . . . Like extreme individualism, it has no place in a virile, progressive society made up of men and women who cherish their independence and self-reliance, and their freedom of choice.”¹⁸ Between these extremes, Manning proposed what he thought to be something more palpable:

a democratic, responsible, free-enterprise society, in which each individual is free to exercise his own initiative and enterprise to

secure and improve his position, while the state assists to whatever extent is necessary to bring the opportunities and benefits of modern society within the reach of all.¹⁹

Moreover, the characteristic of “a genuine, free-enterprise society” included equal opportunity, choice, and freedom for everyone.²⁰

Pastoral Premier

The other famous half to Manning’s public life was that of radio preacher, contributor to the monthly magazine *The Prophetic Voice*, and pastoral correspondent with listeners and others. Most of his sermons were exegetical lessons on prophetic biblical texts sprinkled over, at times, with political commentary.

On one occasion in 1948, Manning responded to Robert Stuart of Woking, Alberta, who was concerned about a broadcast a year earlier. Stuart wanted Manning’s interpretation of Revelation chapter six clarified and Manning explained, “[it] is describing world events of the future that will take place in the period between Christ’s personal appearing at the end of the present Age of Grace and His second coming to establish His personal millennium reign of this world.” Thus, the four horsemen of the apocalypse join ancient prophecy to current events: “[the] whole trend in world affairs today is towards the centralization of power under one world government”; the rider of red horse “coincides with the universal fear that prevails today in this atomic age in which men realize that another world conflict would precipitate devastation on an unprecedented scale”; the riders of both the black and pale horses represent global famine easily brought about by “the power of chemical warfare and atomic radiation to destroy all vegetation and render large areas of earth incapable of producing any kind of plant or animal life.”²¹ Such mixing of theological reflection and political realities early in the Cold War characterized Manning throughout his religious and political careers.

Manning often contended for Christian involvement in society: “[Christians] are to stay the corrupting tendencies and exercise a purifying and preserving influence in all contacts of life. They have an obligation to seek the application of Christian principles in community and national life.”²² Yet he did not shy from searing critique of his co-religionists too eager to rest in the power of the state: “how far short we have fallen!! . . . We wrack our brains to provide more formidable laws to curb crime and

crookedness and we strain our purses to provide more police to enforce the laws.”²³ Extending his jeremiad to resting on the efficacy of taxes, Manning continued, “we tax our energies and our resources to create outer restraints upon humanity but we are not willing to exert ourselves to bring our fellow man to Jesus Christ, the only One Who can provide him with the inner restraint necessary to help him overcome evil with good . . . [then] we be able to check the sinking of the moral foundations of our nation.”²⁴ In this construction there was no fence between the fields of politics and religious faith.

Having a radio-preaching ministry while premier invited critics. In particular, Gerald Payne, President of the Alberta Conference of the United Church of Canada (UCC), sparred with Manning over UCC’s *New Curriculum*. Payne was dismayed by Manning’s criticisms of *New Curriculum* on his radio program. He admitted that he did not listen to Manning’s program, but nonetheless offered to send him the complete set of books free of charge, and stated that he understood both men to “acknowledge Christ as Lord that we are brothers in Him” but that they differed in approach. Though Payne did have misgivings, “it seems to me that you take advantage of your position as Premier of this province and the weight of that office to which the people of all faiths and no faith have elected you to attack the belief and bring misunderstanding amongst the people. Surely some day you will have to give an account of this kind of action.”²⁵

Payne rejected Manning’s biblical hermeneutic:

[You] hit out in the name of Biblical Infallibility . . . [and] assert not only an infallible Bible but infallible interpretation of the Scripture . . . all [critics] seem to derive a perverse kind of delight if they can derive a wedge between a family and the local pastor and congregation . . . but the so-called radio pulpits seem to be content to speak to them over the airways as an all-wise Father image. Jesus had some strong words for those who came amongst the flock with wrong motivation.”²⁶

Payne also understood that arguing theological issues likely would not change either one’s mind, but he wanted to make his case and demonstrate his biblical *bona fides*:

We do believe in Jesus as Lord and accept Him as Son of God. We do take the bible seriously as God’s Word. We differ perhaps from those

who hold that every part of the Bible is infallible so we put Christ first rather than the written word. The Bible, we maintain, contains the Word. It must not be worshipped as a perfect idol which would be to break the First and Second Commandments. The Revelation of God contained in the Record is like a treasure contained in earthen vessels so that the glory can be to God and not to those who convey it.²⁷

Payne explained further, “we may have strong differences of opinion about the Bible and even such basic things as the Creation . . . The Virgin Birth and the Resurrection, all, by the way which we accept if you read our Statements of Faith.”²⁸

Manning wrote a lengthy response to Payne. First he noted that Payne did not listen to his program, “hence your observations are based on the hearsay of others.” Secondly, Manning was concerned for the entire Christian community: “nothing is further from my desire than to be critical of the works of others, especially within the sphere of the Christian Church.” However, since he believed in the “absolute infallibility” of scripture, Manning argued he had to contend for it as Paul did in Galatians 1:6-9, even if not in as strong terms as the apostle.²⁹

He thanked Payne for the offer of the books, but he had already purchased a set, as it “would be most unfair for me to comment on their contents without having perused them personally. I do not, for a moment, doubt the sincerity of those who prepared the material for the extent of research work they did.” Then he elaborated that, after reading the *New Curriculum*, he concluded the authors accepted that “while the abstract truths taught by the Bible are important, the specific biblical records through which these truths are taught are by no means accurate.” He saw this as a “complete rejection of the Bible’s own claims to absolute infallibility” and he believed that it was “absurd” that God would have human writers produce “scientifically and historically inaccurate records for the purpose of teaching mankind the infallible and eternal truths of God.” Manning rejected that people could be convinced of eternal truths if they came from “myths and legends and the product of human minds rather than the infallible revelation of an all-wise God.”³⁰

In defense of his radio ministry Manning responded:

I have repeatedly emphasized that the Church is God’s divinely ordained agency in this world for the proclamation of the Gospel and the edification of the saints. I have repeatedly urged radio listeners to seek out Churches in their community that preach the Gospel and

stand loyal to the Bible as the word of God and to give those Churches their wholehearted and prayerful support.³¹

Furthermore, he noted that he received many letters from United Church members “deeply distressed” by the *New Curriculum*. Yet, when they expressed a desire to leave the United Church, Manning wrote, he encouraged them to stay and work for change from within, thus rejecting Payne’s “all-wise father image.”³²

Manning tried to be consistent in his religious thought and considerate in his governing, even when in conflict with his natural religious audience, though his evangelical disposition typically won out on explicitly religious matters. Mrs. Frank DeMaere, for example, was opposed to the Jehovah Witnesses holding a meeting in Edmonton. She noted the “threat they are to world peace” – they did not read “the true gospel”; not all of them believed Jesus was the Son of God; they did not read the Bible literally; in sum, they should simply not be permitted to gather in Edmonton. In fact, she contended, “their prayers are for one gov[ernment] to control the world,” and she reminded Manning that Canadian soldiers were fighting communists in Korea at that very moment. She exclaimed, “I really believe Mr. Manning that such groups should be outlawed. When their freedom interferes with world freedom I can’t believe they are entitled to it and I think in the long run a lot of violence would be avoided in this way,” though she conceded, “I don’t believe they all realize they are a fifth column for Russia.”³³

Coming at this as one naturally sympathetic, both in his dispensationalist evangelicalism and conservative politics regarding the Cold War and Communism, Manning nonetheless deferred to overriding principles of democracy and classical liberal ideals of freedom and individualism in the context of violence against religious belief. He responded, “I quite concur with your views that these people are wholly unscriptural in their teachings and, by their false teachings, do much to undermine not only the true Christian faith but even the tenants of citizenship. Unfortunately, in a democracy there is no way of stopping people abusing freedom of speech as long as they stay within the bounds prescribed by the laws of the nation.”³⁴ Though not especially “pastoral” to Jehovah Witnesses, he recognized their right to exist:

I do not think that outlawing such groups would accomplish the worthy objective you have in mind. Experience has pretty well established the fact that to make martyrs out of religious fanatics only

advertises their zeal and enables them to capitalize on what they interpret as persecution to further their own ends. In any event, it is not within the authority of the Province to take action along the line that you suggest.³⁵

Regular calls for revival or regeneration in Canadian society made by Manning also invited responses from corners far removed from his evangelical circle. H.F. O'Hanlon, President, Spiritual Regeneration Movement in Calgary, heard him on the radio comment that spiritual revival in Canada was needed. He wrote Manning because he could not agree more. O'Hanlon, in his correspondence, wanted the revival Manning called for to be, at least in part, in line with His Holiness Maharishi Mahesh Yogi of Uttar Kashi, Himalayas, India. To explain himself he sent Manning some booklets.³⁶

Manning responded with an appreciation for his concern regarding spiritual revival, though, as with Jehovah Witnesses, he rejected any spiritual vitality in this context:

While I fully respect your right to subscribe to the teachings of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, honesty compels me to point out that I regard such philosophy as worthless and incomplete contradiction to the plain and, I believe, irrefutable teachings of Holy Writ. The Scriptures make it abundantly clear that spiritual regeneration in the true sense can be performed only by the divine person of the Holy Spirit in the lives of those who appropriate the finished work of Christ for their present and eternal salvation. There is only one true God, one divine Christ and one divine Holy Spirit.³⁷

Going further, Manning took O'Hanlon to task for spiritual deception: "anyone who claims that he can bring about spiritual regeneration by meditation or any other means apart from the supernatural working of the Holy Spirit is either deluded or seeking to delude others. These conclusions are not mine but are the plain and irrefutable teaching of Holy Writ." On the offer to try to arrange a meeting for Manning with Maharishi, "I am sure you will agree that having regard to these facts, there would be no worthwhile purpose served by me meeting Maharishi."³⁸

People as far away as Ontario were interested in how Manning threaded the faith and politics needle. Lester Fretz of Vineland, Ontario, a self-identified listener of Manning's *Back to the Bible* broadcasts and member of an evangelical church, asked, in 1958, how a Christian citizen

could participate in government, even to vote. Manning replied, rejecting two-kingdom theology and stressing conversionism: “it is my belief that true Christianity cannot be divorced from any phase of life. Once a man is genuinely and supernaturally born again of the Holy Spirit the new nature he thereby acquires changes his attitude towards every issue of life including . . . the government or management of the country of which he is a citizen.”³⁹ Though he was clear that Christian political isolation was a problem for society:

One of the reasons we have many of the deplorable conditions of our age is because Christian people have had a tendency to isolate themselves from their day to day responsibilities and reserve the supervision of those things which set the standards of morality under which society operates to men who are either disinterested in spiritual things or who, if they are interested, have nearly subscribed to a Christian philosophy of life but have never had the personal experience of a supernatural spiritual rebirth.⁴⁰

In fact, Manning argued, “all fields of public life and citizenship today are desperately in need of the influence of active Christian laymen. The opportunities for Christian testimony and effective soul winning in those fields are tremendous but, unfortunately, are being avoided or ignored by many professing Christians.”⁴¹ Manning articulated the classic Christian axiom that a believer is in the world but not of it, and “there is no Scriptural justification for excluding public affairs and other responsibilities of citizenship from the field of his influence.”⁴²

It was, however, a common question. In 1964, Mrs. A.F. Gough of Bridesville, British Columbia, wondered how Manning reconciled being a Christian and in politics. To answer her query, he made several points. First, it is a “common misconception that if Christians have anything to do with material administration they are, thereby, advocating it as a solution to the problems which can be solved only through spiritual regeneration . . . but it is obvious to all that man’s material needs rightly must be taken care of.” Manning noted Christ exemplified this with the miracle of the feeding of 5000. Being a born again Christian changes one’s outlook and priorities, but both physical and material needs must be met and, besides, why should the administration of government only be for the “unregenerate . . . who reject Jesus Christ as Savior.” Drawing on the long biblical storyline of political engagement, he cited examples of Joseph in Egypt, Daniel in Babylon, and Paul using his Roman citizenship for protection.⁴³

Perhaps Manning's most succinct description of the role of faith in politics came from a correspondence interview in 1966 with Paul Nybert, editor of the Christian Service Brigade (CSB) magazine, *Venture*, following a meeting they had in San Francisco at the Christian Businessmen's Committee Convention. Although Manning did not know much about CSB, he was impressed by what he had seen in their work. He wrote Nybert that he thought Christians needed to be in politics where their influence was needed. To this end, Manning's favorite verse was Colossians 1:18; as he explained, the will of God was discovered through "infallible Scriptures [*sic*]," an "intimate fellowship with Christ and the Holy Spirit"; he attempted to incorporate both into his radio ministry. The quadrilateral ambition of his *Back to the Bible* was to teach the Bible as the "infallible Word of God," help guide people to Christ, expand the biblical knowledge of Christians, and demonstrate the significance of world events in light of scripture.⁴⁴

Alcohol

In the practical realities of politics, this attention to liberty, freedom of the individual, and a Christian evangelicalism that eschews the primacy of materialism and highlights conversion, regeneration, and care for physical needs in a pluralistic society were worked out in Manning's correspondence on alcohol and business on the Lord's Day. Manning also had to manage expectations of his radio listeners on legislative matters. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, Alberta's liquor laws were being liberalized to expand licenses for liquor stores and drinking establishments, as well as to end gender segregation laws, and to amend the separation of food and drink in hotels and restaurants. His audience was perplexed. Though he preached against intoxicants and agreed that alcoholism was a serious issue, he wrote a longer than usual response to Mrs. Harriet Lane of Spring Coulee, a fan of his radio ministry. Manning explained that it was a concern of his that no solution had yet been discovered for alcoholism. Furthermore, cures for alcohol abuse could not simply be made via legislation: "I am convinced it is useless to try to legislate people into a state of temperance. No law, however well meaning, is possible of enforcement unless it carries the endorsement of at least a majority of the people affected by it and certainly this is not the case in respect to laws frequently proposed for the curbing of the manufacture or sale of liquor."⁴⁵ While he personally desired a dry society, he understood that simply

passing laws to reform lives was no solution.

Mary Carlyle of Red Deer, Alberta, was upset with the government legalizing liquor; she called it “treason” against God, accusing the government of only being after more money. After giving a series of anecdotes of alcohol destroying lives, she concluded that if government made it legal, people would think it was proper behavior.⁴⁶ Manning responded:

My own conviction is the situation never will be remedied by an imposition of man-made laws and restrictions. I believe that only by spiritual regeneration on the part of individual men and women will we arrive at the solution to the problem. Experience has shown that no amount of state-imposed restrictions or secular education can cope successfully with the evil consequences of inherent human depravity.⁴⁷

Manning explained further that the government received more demands for easing liquor laws than tightening them. He also rejected the argument that a provincial run liquor trade lent alcohol a protective layer of moral decency: “I cannot quite agree that the fact the Government does control the distribution of beer and liquor has given the liquor business a status of decency that it otherwise would not enjoy. Certainly so called ‘social’ drinking is equally as prevalent in those countries and states where the Governments do not exercise such control.” If government had a role in reducing alcohol consumption, he considered education the best vehicle for preventing alcoholism and had the Department of Education work on temperance education.⁴⁸

Of special concern to Harriet Lane was how Manning justified his actions as premier on the liquor file as an evangelical Christian. Manning responded by explaining his vision of democracy:

My efforts to lead people into the Christian way of life being [are], in your opinion, inconsistent with the Government not imposing even greater restrictions on the sale and distribution of liquor. My concept of democratic government is government that carries out the expressed will of the people whom it serves rather than imposing on them its own viewpoint no matter how idealistic that viewpoint might be.⁴⁹

The issue was also important in his religious imagination: “the reason I

give every minute of time that I can to the promulgation of Christianity is because I am convinced that there is no other solution to the liquor problem or any other problem that stems from the debased appetites of men other than the transformation of life that is brought about through the spiritual regeneration of the individual.”⁵⁰ Going further, he continued on the theme of conversionism:

If I thought for one moment that the evils of the liquor business could be eliminated or even curbed by preaching temperance sermons, I would preach one every Sunday but I am convinced while such a course would be popular with some people it would not be effective in solving the problem . . . On the other hand, if men and women are led to embrace true Christianity and experience genuine personal regeneration there is no more liquor problem as far as they are concerned.⁵¹

Mr. and Mrs. Harold Murgatred wrote one of many letters to Manning protesting a proposed liquor store to be established in Innisfail. Though against the store, the Murgatreds were distinct in their attempt to see the issue from both sides. They explained that they understood that business was already going to nearby Red Deer for liquor, thus the local business community desired a store of their own. However, that business argument held no weight for the Murgatreds: “if people would fight as enthusiastically for the right things . . . we might ultimately have a town to be proud of, and one to which Christian people could take their families on a Saturday night without being subjected to vile and indecent language openly used on the streets and in public places.” Profit motive in the liquor trade carried no water for them:

‘What does it profit a man – if he lose his soul.’ [*sic*] Apparently some of our businessmen are more concerned about their personal profits than the souls of their fellowmen. That being the case there are some of us who feel called upon to act the role of being ‘our brother’s keeper’ – especially to youth. While we know your own personal stand on these matters, we also realize that even as premier, you are only one man against many, perhaps even the ‘lone voice crying in the wilderness.’⁵²

In conclusion, they called upon Manning to help stop the spread of alcohol.⁵³ Manning responded that “the desires of the people of the various

communities are naturally divided. The Government cannot ignore the fact that the manufacture and sale of liquor is a legitimate business . . . and we therefore cannot discriminate against this particular business any more than another irrespective of what our personal views may be.”⁵⁴

Evelyn Thompson of the United Church wrote and called for a ban on gender “mixed” drinking establishments to continue in Edmonton and Calgary. To allow mixed drinking in the beer rooms was to invite three specific problems: more consumption than would occur otherwise, “moral ‘let-down’ was more pronounced among both men and women when drinking together in public places,” and “beer-rooms were not fit and safe places to which men may invite their wives, daughters and women friends.”⁵⁵ Manning responded that there was much pressure on government by many people and organizations to lift the ban in Edmonton and Calgary, especially as it was permitted everywhere else in the province.⁵⁶ Thompson, nevertheless, opposed mixed drinking in addition to the above letter as it would increase problems in the home and “mixed drinking salons would provide happy hunting grounds for women with designs of bank rolls and money bags.”⁵⁷

Most correspondence exchanges were with women and women’s groups over a fairly consistent litany of problems, sexual crimes and drunk driving being the most common. Throughout 1953, for example, the Women’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) actively wrote Manning about the dangers of liberalized alcohol laws, targeting such changes in the law as “an increasing amount of liquor advertising.” They also wanted government to ban drinking scenes in movies, radio, and television programs.⁵⁸

Defending government involvement in the liquor trade to the WCTU, Manning argued that it was not about revenue: “I can assure you that the Alberta Government would gladly lose all the revenues accruing to the public treasury from the sale of liquor if, at the same time, all problems associated with liquor were removed. It is not the Government which insists on selling liquor but the majority of the people who will obtain it in spite of anything a Government can do.”⁵⁹ Despite Manning’s pragmatic view of government and liquor, it still bothered the teetotalers in his base that he listened to both sides of the issue while being clear in his own perspective and values on the issue. He maintained the ban on mixed drinking, though he conceded that the proposal that “the compulsory supper hour closing as applied to beer parlors by the Alberta Liquor Control Board be extended to clubs, would not be feasible.” These places

also served meals so closing them at mealtime was “not practical,” but he maintained the supper closing for the beer houses.⁶⁰

Constituents opposed to a new liquor bill going before the legislature noticed that in Manning’s radio sermons he said nothing against the liquor traffic, but he did offer commentary about the Social Credit government. According to M.H. Hagen, general merchant in oil and gas, the premier was “intend[ing] to legislate a bill which is going to ease or make it possible for the public to get this cursed stuff any place and any where. As a Christian leader of our fair province and people, this is going to be a washout of all the radio sermons you broadcast in a hundred years. So I trust by the grace of God you have courage to fight this bill. To a finish.”⁶¹ Manning was on the defensive and responded; the bill introduced by the government “provides for greater control and enforcement of the Liquor laws of this province than the control and enforcement provided in the former Liquor Act. The Government has no intention whatsoever of making traffic in liquor ‘wide open’ as you seem to think.”⁶²

In a happier moment with the United Church, A.C. Forrest, editor of the *United Church Observer*, wrote to Manning about writing an article on what it was like being a person in high office who did not drink alcohol. His reason, “I often hear young people say that they find themselves handicapped socially and in their work because they don’t drink” and he wanted Manning’s perspective since Forrest doubted those youthful claims.⁶³

Manning supported Forrest’s idea of the article and encouraging young people to “realize that it is not necessary for them to drink in order to be successful, either socially or in their chosen occupation.” He called the idea that without alcohol one was handicapped “subtle propaganda that has no real foundation in fact.” As premier, he knew of what he spoke; as he circulated with “innumerable people socially and otherwise, I have never found the fact that I am a total abstainer any handicap or source of embarrassment. On the contrary, I have found that people respect the right of an individual to abstain as much as they respect the right of another man to drink, if he so desires.” He had also seen “the far-reaching injurious effects of excessive drinking on family, community and business life” and “I have yet to meet a man who has been made a better man, a better husband or father, or a better business man by the use of alcohol. I have known many where the reverse has been obvious. My advice to all young people is – leave it alone. It will never do you any good. It can do incalculable harm.”⁶⁴

His constant refrain was that Christians should be doing those things that encouraged spiritual revival rather than simply seeking the righteousness of others through “man-made laws.”⁶⁵ And this continued as pressure developed to relax commercial restrictions on the Lord’s Day.

Lord’s Day

The issue of work on the Lord’s Day for Manning was raised by the Lord’s Day Alliance of Canada (LDAC) in March 1946. George Webber, general secretary of the LDAC, sent him a copy of their 1944 annual report stating, “in doing so we are prompted by the conviction that the future of Sunday in Canada is closely related to the building of a Christian democracy.”⁶⁶

They gave examples of the toll of Sunday work, made evident already with the war effort now consuming six-years-worth of Sunday labor, in addition to longer workdays, all documented by the LDAC. They discovered that production efficiencies needed workers to have rest days, so some took a seventh day off, while others set up shifts to keep production on a seven-day week with workers staggered to have a seventh day of rest. Thus the idea of a Lord’s Day of rest was already recognized and practiced by industry operating at full-time war capacity. The LDAC recognized social pressures to open theatres on Sundays so troops could have some entertainment and they called for Sunday entertainments for troops to be performed as a service to servicemen and not for financial gain. They suggested that one theatre in “each of four Canadian cities” should be opened on Sunday to provide free movies to servicemen. The LDAC met with the National Defense Council and expressed their appreciation for their courtesies in discussing the issue of Sunday entertainment and working with movie production companies and theatre owners to make this possible. The purpose of the LDAC was to protect a regular rest day for Canadians, citing health benefits to body and soul, and they were especially concerned that, with the end of war, the loosening of Sunday laws during wartime would continue. Despite talk of protecting workers’ “Sunday freedom,” they wanted the suspension of Sunday sale of gasoline during the war years to continue after the conflict was over, even communicating with oil companies to protect Sunday worker freedom on this point. Members of the LDAC held discussions with the CBC to halt commercials on Sundays to help cut down on commercial activity one day a week.⁶⁷

In a Lord's Day Act (LDA) case, Manning responded to Mr. Littman, a constituent of A.O. Fimrite, Member of the Legislative Assembly, who was charged with violating the LDA in running his sawmill. Manning responded that there was no choice but to prosecute as there was an accident that Sunday at Littman's sawmill that necessitated an investigation that led to the charge: "as you know, it is not our practice to designate police officials to run down such cases of Lord's Day Act violations but where they are reported, or if circumstances such as the accident at Mr. Littman's mill brings them to light, we have no alternative but to prosecute." That Littman was Seventh Day Adventist had no bearing as Sunday was Sunday and there were no exemptions made on religious grounds – the LDA barred commercial business on Sunday. If religious exemptions were made to Seventh Day Adventists or Jews, for example, while others were forced to remain closed that would not be fair.⁶⁸

Manning also rejected the argument that coin operated laundries be permitted to open on Sundays as they were the same as vending machines; rather, they were judged fixed businesses at fixed addresses. Manning concluded: "I quite frankly admit my inability to understand the arguments sometimes advanced that the operation of laundries on Sunday is necessary because people haven't the time to attend to these matter during the week. It seems strange to me that in an age when we have shorter work weeks and more leisure time than ever before in history this has become the case."⁶⁹ He continued, observing the coming slippery slope:

I am, and I am sure many others are gravely disturbed by the progressive tendency towards an ever greater degree of commercialization of Sunday. Each additional step in that direction is used as an argument for going a step further until the ultimate end can only mean the complete abandonment of the concept of Sunday as a day free from general commercial activities and as a day respected as a time of worship and relaxation.⁷⁰

Manning wrote in spring 1962, "we as a government are also concerned about the pressures today for a relaxation of provisions of The Lord's Day Act."⁷¹ He stressed the point that "the government has never had the slightest intention of allowing bars to open on Sundays."⁷²

In response to Alberta Bible College President Ernest Hansell's concern over commercial Sunday sports, dated 4 November 1965, Manning explained that though he and Hansell shared concerns about the

commercializing of Sunday, “I do think we must recognize, however, the difference between our personal Christian convictions and the right of citizens in a free society to hold contrary views and to have them respected as far as governments are concerned, if they are the wishes of a majority of citizens.” As with alcohol, he stated his view of morality, Christianity, and society: “If it were possible to legislate morality of the proper Christian observance of Sunday, it would be a different matter but I know you will agree that respect for Sunday which is forced by law rather than the attitude and desire of the individual citizen is meaningless and hypocritical . . . God didn’t build a fence around the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the Garden of Eden because forced obedience to His will would have been meaningless.”⁷³

Conclusion

Manning’s pragmatic view of government and liquor, born from a view of society shaped by a Cold War emphasis on individual freedom and evangelical conversionism, ironically bothered the teetotalers in his base who embraced similar values on human depravity, individual freedom, and the primacy of a democratic political system. Religious convictions animated many of Manning’s correspondents, and he responded, walking a fine line of political reality and evangelical convictions. There were confluences but also divergences in how to bring both to governing. Manning was socially conservative, but he did not wish to legislate a Christian society into existence; rather, he pursued that desire through his radio ministry, hoping to draw people to evangelical Christianity as converts and then to grow in that faith. Binding all these elements together was his overriding belief in freedom, non-intrusive government in social matters, the preeminence of the individual, and the importance of Christians being active in government but respectful of its role and limits in society.

Endnotes

1. This project was supported by research grants from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) and Canadian Mennonite University.

2. Letter from Mrs. N. Torgrud to Premier E.C. Manning, 1 June 1943, p. 1-4. Quote p. 4 and punctuation corrected. 69.289, Microfilm Roll 126, File 1178, Premier's Papers (Ernest C. Manning) 1921-59, Provincial Archives of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta [PAA]. Older naming conventions for women are only used as used in the original documents and where the name itself cannot be determined.
3. Premier Manning to Mrs. Torgrud, 14 June 1943, 69.289, Microfilm Roll 126, File 1178, Premier's Papers (Ernest C. Manning) 1921-59, PAA.
4. Beryl Lee to Ernest Manning, correspondence, 1 May 1944, 69.289, Microfilm Roll 126, File 1179, Premier's Papers (Ernest C. Manning) 1921-59, PAA.
5. Ernest Manning to Mrs. Beryl Lee, Fort Assiniboine, AB, correspondence, 6 June 1944, 69.289, Microfilm Roll 126, File 1179, Premier's Papers (Ernest C. Manning) 1921-59, PAA.
6. Ernest C. Manning, "Wake Up and Live: Highlights from The Back to the Bible Hour Broadcast," *The Prophetic Voice* 15, no. 5 (December, 1956): 3, 7; and Ernest C. Manning, "Wake Up and Live: Highlights from The Back to the Bible Hour Broadcast," *The Prophetic Voice* 9, no. 6 (November, 1950): 2-3, M1357, Box 3, File 16, *Prophetic Voice*, Calgary Prophetic Bible Institute fonds, The Glenbow Archives, Calgary, Alberta (GA).
7. "Social Credit in Alberta and British Columbia," Ernest Charles Manning interview, 13-14.
8. E.C. Manning, "These are the Facts," #5, Week of 7 February 1955, 1, PR 1986.125, File 406 Radio Talks by E.C. Manning, These Are the Facts #1-20, Jan-May 1955, PAA.
9. E.C. Manning, "These are the Facts," #5, Week of 7 February 1955, 1, PR 1986.125, File: 406 Radio Talks by E.C. Manning, These Are the Facts #1-20, Jan-May 1955, PAA.
10. Manning, "These are the Facts," #5, 2-3.
11. Ernest C. Manning, "The Fork in the Road," Address to the Toronto Canadian Club, Tele-Facts, Edmonton, Alberta, 2 December 1963, p.2. PR 0071, Ernest C. Manning fonds, ACC. No. 85.437, Box 1, File: 85.437/3, PAA.
12. Manning, "The Fork in the Road," 3-4.
13. Manning, "The Fork in the Road," 6.
14. Manning, "The Fork in the Road," 6-7.

15. Manning, "The Fork in the Road," 8.
16. Ernest C. Manning, "Some Ground Rules for a Free Society," *Tele-Facts* 3:8, 4 January 1966, 3-4, PR0071 Ernest C. Manning fonds, ACC. No. 85.437, Box 1, File 85.437/3, PAA.
17. Manning, "Some Ground Rules for a Free Society," 3-4.
18. Manning, "Some Ground Rules for a Free Society," 3-4.
19. Manning, "Some Ground Rules for a Free Society," 4.
20. Manning, "Some Ground Rules for a Free Society," 6.
21. Manning to Robert Stuart, Woking, AB, 6 July 1948, Microfilm Roll 145, File 1482, PAA.
22. Ernest C. Manning, "Wake Up and Live: Highlights from The Back to the Bible Hour Broadcast," *The Prophetic Voice* 19, no. 2 (September, 1960): 3, M1357, Box 3, File 16, *Prophetic Voice*, Calgary Prophetic Bible Institute fonds, GA.
23. Manning, "Wake Up and Live: Highlights from The Back to the Bible Hour Broadcast," 3.
24. Manning, "Wake Up and Live: Highlights from The Back to the Bible Hour Broadcast," 3.
25. Gerald W. Payne, President, Alberta Conference of the United Church of Canada to Ernest Manning, correspondence, 30 October 1964, GR 1977.173 Office of the Premier, Box 39, File 395a, PAA.
26. Payne to Manning, 30 October 1964. All caps and ellipses are in the letter.
27. Payne to Manning, 30 October 1964.
28. Payne to Manning, 30 October 1964. All caps and ellipses are in the letter.
29. Ernest Manning to Gerald W. Payne, President, Alberta Conference of the United Church of Canada, correspondence, 17 November 1964, GR 1977.173 Office of the Premier, Box 39, File 395a, PAA. The passage cited by Manning reads, "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, if any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed." Galatians 1:6-9, King James Version (KJV).

30. Manning to Payne, 17 November 1964.
31. Ernest Manning to Gerald W. Payne, President, Alberta Conference of the United Church of Canada, correspondence, 17 November 1964, GR 1977.173 Office of the Premier, Box 39, File 395a, PAA.
32. Ernest Manning to Gerald W. Payne, President, Alberta Conference of the United Church of Canada, correspondence, 17 November 1964, GR 1977.173 Office of the Premier, Box 39, File 395a, PAA.
33. Mrs. Frank DeMaere to Manning 3 June 1951, 1-2, Microfilm Roll 179, File 1908, PAA.
34. Manning letter to DeMaere 19 June 1951, Microfilm Roll 179, File 1908, PAA.
35. Manning letter to DeMaere 19 June 1951.
36. H. F. O'Hanlon, President, Spiritual Regeneration Movement, Calgary to Ernest Manning, correspondence, 6 July 1964, GR 1977.173 Office of the Premier, Box 39, File 395a, PAA. The booklets were unnamed.
37. O'Hanlon to Manning, 6 July 1964; [Manning quotes from] Ernest Manning to H.F. O'Hanlon, President, Spiritual Regeneration Movement, Calgary, correspondence, 21 July 1964, GR 1977.173 Office of the Premier, Box 39, File 395a, PAA.
38. O'Hanlon to Manning, 6 July 1964; and [Manning quotes from] Manning to O'Hanlon, 21 July 1964.
39. Lester C. Fretz, Vineland, ON, to Manning, 22 July 1958; and Manning to Fretz 24 July 1958, Microfilm Roll 198, File 2187, PAA.
40. Fretz to Manning, 22 July 1958; and Manning to Fretz, 24 July 1958.
41. Fretz to Manning, 22 July 1958.
42. Fretz to Manning, 22 July 1958.
43. Ernest Manning to Mrs. A.F. Gough, Bridesville, BC correspondence, 11 March 1964, GR 1977.173 Office of the Premier, Box 39, File 395a, PAA.
44. Paul D. Nybert, Editor, *Venture*, Christian Service Brigade, Wheaton, Illinois to Ernest Manning, correspondence 26 January 1966; and Ernest Manning to Paul D. Nybert, Editor, *Venture*, Christian Service Brigade, Wheaton, Illinois, correspondence 18 February 1966, GR 1977.173 Office of the Premier, Box 74, File 799a, PAA.

45. Ernest Manning to Mrs. Harriet Lane, 6 February 1951, correspondence, 69.289, Microfilm Roll 169, File 1788A, Premier's Papers (Ernest C. Manning) 1921-59, Provincial Archives of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta (PAA).
46. Mary Carlyle to Manning Red Deer, Alberta, 7 May 1949, correspondence, Microfilm Roll 168, File 1786, PAA.
47. Manning to Carlyle 14 May 1949, correspondence, Microfilm Roll 168, File 1786, PAA.
48. Ernest Manning to Mrs. Harriet Lane, 6 February 1951.
49. Ernest Manning to Mrs. Harriet Lane, 6 February 1951.
50. Ernest Manning to Mrs. Harriet Lane, 6 February 1951.
51. Ernest Manning to Mrs. Harriet Lane, 6 February 1951.
52. Letter from Mr. and Mrs. Harold Murgatred to Manning 19 December 1949, correspondence, Microfilm Roll 168, File 1786, PAA.
53. Mr. and Mrs. Harold Murgatred to Manning 19 December 1949. Letters throughout this file on this issue are from individuals, churches, including the United Church and Presbyterians, against this store and its possibly corrupting influences especially on children and young people. Written in often spiritual or Christian language, this is a similar story articulated throughout Alberta on this issue in this file.
54. Manning to Mr. and Mrs. Harold Murgatred, 23 December 1949, correspondence, Microfilm Roll 168, File 1786, PAA.
55. [Evelyn E. Thompson] W.M.S.S. The Edmonton Presbyterian of the United Church of Canada to Manning [29 Jan. 1949], correspondence, Microfilm Roll 168, File 1786, PAA.
56. Manning to Evelyn E. Thompson 7 February 1949, correspondence, Microfilm Roll 168, File 1786, PAA. This is one example of several such exchanged by various people/groups though most are from women and women's groups citing a consistent litany of problems: sexual crimes and drunken driving being the most common.
57. Evelyn E. Thompson to Manning 29 January 1949, correspondence, Microfilm Roll 168, File:1786, PAA. Manning response 7 February 1949 is virtually the same as above to Evelyn, giving a stock response.
58. Lillian Berrecloth to Manning, 16 May 1953, correspondence, Microfilm Roll 179, File 1909, PAA.

59. Manning to Minerva A. Smith President, WCTU, Grande Prairie, AB 22 Sept. 1953, correspondence, Microfilm Roll 169, File 1788B, PAA.
60. Manning to Mrs. Caroline A. Nicoll, 10 April 1953, correspondence, Microfilm Roll 169, File 1788B, PAA.
61. M.H. Hagen, General Merchant in Gas and Oil, to Manning 21 March 1953, correspondence, Microfilm Roll 169, File 1788B, PAA.
62. Manning to Hagen of Valhalla, AB 23 March 1953, correspondence, Microfilm Roll 169, File 1788B, PAA.
63. A.C. Forrest, Editor, *United Church Observer*, to Ernest Manning, 23 August 1957, PR 0071 Ernest C. Manning fonds, ACC. No. 85.437, Box 1, File 85.437/7 Correspondence, PAA.
64. Ernest Manning to A.C. Forrest, Correspondence, 27 September 1957, PR 0071 Ernest C. Manning fonds, ACC. No. 85.437, Box 1, File 85.437/7 Correspondence, PAA.
65. Ernest Manning to Mrs. H. Congo, Sr, Three Hills, AB, correspondence, 3 July 1964, GR 1977.173 Office of the Premier, Box 39, File 395a, PAA.
66. George Webber, general secretary, Lord's Day Alliance of Canada to Manning, 1 March 1946, Microfilm Roll 126, File 1179, PAA.
67. The Lord's Day Alliance of Canada Annual Report 30 November 1944, 2-4 [part of letter George Webber, general secretary, Lord's Day Alliance of Canada to Manning, 1 March 1946,]. Microfilm Roll 126, File 1179, PAA.
68. Ernest Manning, Premier, Attorney General to A.O. Fimrite, MLA, Wanham, AB, correspondence, 18 July 1962, GR 1977.173 Office of the Premier, Box 5, File 47, PAA.
69. Ernest Manning, Premier [and Attorney General] to J. E. Sydie, Edmonton, AB, correspondence, 27 April 1962, GR 1977.173 Office of the Premier, Box 5, File 47, PAA.
70. Manning to Sydie, 27 April 1962.
71. Ernest Manning, Premier, Attorney General to Mrs. Evan R. Stewart, Church Clerk, Nanton Baptist Church, Nanton, AB, correspondence, 4 April 1962, GR 1977.173 Office of the Premier, Box 5, File 47, PAA.
72. Ernest Manning, Premier, [and Attorney General] to H. Ballerini, Calgary, AB, correspondence, 28 February 1962, GR 1977.173 Office of the Premier, Box 5, File 47, PAA. Throughout this file, he made clear, passim, that as it was a federal statute, Alberta could not simply change it or outright ignore it

– thus the enforcement that occurred, even if not vigorous.

73. Ernest Manning, Premier, [and Attorney General] to Ernest G. Hansell, President, Alberta Bible College, Calgary, AB, correspondence, 15 November 1965, GR 1977.173 Office of the Premier, Box 5, File 48b, PAA.

